and when i start to come undone (stitch me together)
by barbiewrites

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Sometimes, since moving to Indiana, Billy gets the feeling like he’s trying to convince himself he’s happy.

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Sometimes, since moving to Indiana, Billy gets the feeling like he's trying to *convince* himself he's happy. Steve makes him happy, and yeah, sometimes Max manages, but beyond that… there's nothing in Hawkins that he gets pumped up about. He tells Steve after school one day when the two of them are passing a blunt in the backseat of Steve's BMW.

"I —" the question dies on Steve's lips. *I don't make you happy?*

"Of course you do —" Billy answers, then sighs, takes another drag, "— and, I mean, Max, I guess. Sometimes. But… fuck. I don't know. I used to *experience* shit, in San Diego. I just feel like I'm *living* here."

Steve gives up a smile at the idea, taking the blunt back. Maybe fighting monsters was an *experience* , but not really one he wanted to give Billy. He didn't want… something to happen, where Billy moves, and forgets Hawkins like a bad memory — mostly because he doesn't want Billy forgetting *him* , because Billy means the world to him — so, the only logical thing to do would be to give Billy an *experience* .

Steve gets the idea on a Sunday morning, when he and Billy have just finished showering a nights worth of sex off, and since Steve was last out of the shower, Billy gets stereo privileges.

Metallica's *Seek & Destroy* is playing, Billy banging his head around as he dresses himself in the mirror, tongue between his teeth. Steve

watches from the doorway of his ensuite, towel around his hips and a smile on his lips.

“Good wake up song,” Steve comments when it dies out, giving them a few quiet seconds before the next song on the tape shuffled on.

“It’s a damn good song,” Billy reasons as he pulls on his boxers.

“Never said it wasn’t,” his boyfriend replies in a sing-song, opening up his closet. “You ever seen them live?”

Billy scoffs. “I seem like the kinda guy who can afford that shit?”

“You ever seen *anyone* live?”

“Are you really gonna make me repeat myself?”

Steve turns, pulling a sweater off the hanger and looking over at Billy, checking himself out in the mirror. “Seriously?”

Billy doesn’t even seem to hear him, just adjusts his jeans and plays with his curls.

“Hey. Mr. Self-Obsessed.” He calls, and Billy looks over to him, seemingly unimpressed with the name. “You’ve really never been to a

concert?”

Billy chuckles. “Those things are fuckin’ expensive. Twenty bucks to see a bunch of rich fucks jerk themselves off in front of a crowd?” Billy inhales sharply. “Yeah. No fuckin’ way.”

“Huh.” Steve worries a lip, thinking it over. Indianapolis isn’t all *that* far.

“The fuck is this?”

This happens to be a thin, unmarked white envelope, slightly crumpled that had just been slid in front of one Billy Hargrove after first period.

“It’s a gift,” Steve answers, prompting Billy to raise his eyebrows and pick up the envelope, “you give it to people you like.”

Billy huffs out a humorless ‘shut up’, then works a finger into the seam, starts tearing it open. “I hope it’s a pony.”

“You’re real funny, Hargrove.”

“It’s all part of the charm,” Billy grins around the toothpick in his mouth, wide and wolfish as his finger breaks the last part of the seal. He opens it, tilts the contents out. Four small, green tinted paper slips with thick letters reading ‘METALLICA,’ followed by information on the date, time, address for the concert. A look of shock falls over Billy’s face, and he reaches to pick one up, then looks at Steve. “You’re fucking kidding me.”

Steve’s smile is impossibly wide. “Nope. Look — they’re standing.”

“Fucking — four?! How much did these cost?”

Steve has long since learned how to dodge Billy’s money questions. “I got them when I was up in Indianapolis with my dad for that convention. Besides, I got ones for Nance and Jonathan, too, so you guys can all get to know one another.”

Billy is too excited to resist Steve’s obsession with his perfect little friend group he’d been trying to drag together. “ *Fuck* , Steve.”

“You can tell me I’m the best now.”

Billy sends him a look. “Locker rooms. Fifth period. I’ll *show* you who’s the best.” The tinny bell sounds, and Steve picks the tickets back up, tucks them into the envelope.

“I’ll see you there, angel.”

“Since when do *I* seem like the type of girl to like *Metallica* ?” Nancy asks, shutting her locker and beginning to walk away — doing that thing Steve *hated* when she just expected you to know where she was going and when she was going and, most importantly, to keep up.

“I dunno, I just thought it might be fun, for you and Jonathan to get to know —“

“We *know* Billy, Steve.” She looks up at him, and Steve can’t even hold his sigh back.

Steve knows he’s useless beside her, so he speeds up, steps in front of her to take her attention. “Not the new Billy. He’s different now, Nancy, really.”

They share a long look, like they’re arguing back and forth with only their eyes, before Nancy tosses her head back. “ *Fine* ,” she sighs, then holds her hand out, “Jonathan will like it.”

Steve internally pumps his fist.

Nancy reads over the look, then twists her lips to the side. “This weekend?”

“Yeah - wha - what’s wrong with this weekend?”

Nancy twists her lips. “My family from Maine is coming down and I kinda said I’d let Jonathan meet them properly.”

Steve’s jaw drops, and Nancy sidesteps him to continue on towards Chemistry.

“Wha - can’t you do it on Friday? Or Sunday?”

“They’re only stopping by for a night, on their way to St. Louis.” Steve can’t even be mad at her, because she *actually* looks sheepish this time. She twists on her feet, looking up at Steve from beside Mr. Thompson’s classroom. “They’re good tickets, though. I bet you could sell them off, and I’ll even help, if I can.”

Steve scuffs his sneakers on the floor, looking down at the ticket. So much for the *Fearsome Foursome* — the name Steve had given them for after they all united and became best friends. “Alright,” he can’t hide the disappointment in his tone, “thanks, Nance.”

“We’ll find someone,” she promises, squeezing his arm, “ *after* my quiz.”

“You bought Billy tickets to see Metallica?!”

Steve nearly jumps out of his skin at Max’s arrival at his window, sticking her head right in his car while he waiting for Dustin. She gives him a look, half way between expectant and exasperated. Steve splutters out an answer, and she cuts him off. For two people who insisted they *weren’t* related, she sure reminded him of Billy.

“You bought Billy Metallica tickets and didn’t invite *me* ?”

Oh.

“I didn’t even know you *liked* Metallica!” Steve reasons, matching her fervent tone.

Max huffs, unzipping her jacket to reveal her t-shirt. ‘METALLICA’ it read in a sharp font, then in smaller, sketched letters under neath, ‘METAL UP YOUR ASS.’

“Okay, I have never seen that before.” It hardly seemed school appropriate, anyway, but then again, Billy got away with hardly wearing a shirt at all.

“Billy gave it to me. For Christmas.”

He doesn’t remember the shirt itself, but he remembers Billy clocking a few extra hours at the diner to save up for something. Now knowing what it was, it was even sweeter.

As much as he was looking forward to a night with Billy, a night *without* kids, he really did love seeing Max and Billy bond. Plus, she did look genuinely hurt that Steve had left her out.

Steve sighs, runs a hand through his hair. “Tell you what. If you can find someone to come with, you can come.”

She looks insulted at the requirement. “Why?”

“I was selling two tickets, now, if you come, it’ll be one. Two was hard enough, and no one wants to go drive up to Indianapolis and go to a concert by their damn self.”

Max considers it a moment, looks down at her shirt, then back up to Steve. “El.”

Steve pulls a face, “You wanna bring *El* ?”

“What of it?” She asks, bristling at the question. *Just* like Billy.

He holds his hand up in surrender, “You sure she won’t…. get scared? By the people… overwhelmed by the music?”

It’s Max’s turn to screw her face up. “She can kill people with her mind.”

Steve twists around in his seat quickly, making sure they were more or less alone. “Say it a little louder, why don’t you?!” He whisper yells, and just like Billy would, looks unimpressed. “Fine. Fair.”

“The fuck are you two doing?”

Max turns to look at her brother. “Steve just invited me to see Metallica with you guys.”

Expecting the worst, Steve jumps to his own defense, “That is *not* what happened. Max invited herself. *And* El.”

Billy claps her upside the head. “Where the fuck are your manners?”

“Up your ass,” she responds without missing a beat, punching him in the arm.

Billy sticks a cigarette between his lips, rolling his eyes, then fishes a lighter from his pocket and lights up, “You don’t know shit about my

ass." He sends Steve a knowing look, then extends the cigarette to him. Credit where credit is due, Steve was expecting him to freak the fuck out about his sister crashing their date. Then again, he'd probably rather it be her and her weird friend than Jonathan and Nancy.

To his surprise, it's Max's hand jumping out and grabbing the cigarette. "Steve doesn't smoke anymore," she says, matter-of-factly, and tosses it to the ground before stomping on it.

"Like fuck he doesn't," Billy hisses, followed by, "bitch."

"Asshole."

Steve feels like he's watching a sitcom.

"Can we go now? I wanna call El before Neil gets home."

Billy sends Steve another look. "Nine?"

Steve nods, and with that, Billy and Max are walking away. He's clapped a hand on Max's shoulder, directing her back to the Camaro.

"You owe me a dime for that cigarette."

It's the night before the concert, and Friday means date night for Neil and Susan. Steve had been invited over, only because Neil was like clockwork. Ready by 4:45, walking out the door at 4:50, home by 11. Somewhere along the way, Max's weird friend had been picked up.

Billy didn't know El all that well, only that she was the cop's kid, and that made him wary. Gave him enough reason to back off. But she was a friend of Max's, and his step sister had insisted that El come over for the afternoon because she had to pick out something to wear because her closet didn't include concert clothes. Billy knows the importance of wearing the right thing, so he relents.

It's seven when Max barges into his room without knocking. Given how the Steve and Billy, when given the slightest bit of privacy, act like rabbits in heat, she walks in at a good moment. Billy is throwing darts across the room onto a board where he's taped a newspaper cutout of Ronald Reagan's face.

"Move," she demands, shoving past Billy to get to his dresser. The two boys exchange looks, and Steve whistles.

"The fuck are you doing in here?" He asks as she yanks a dresser drawer open, beginning to leaf through his clothes.

"El needs something to wear, and I only have the one shirt." Only

then, does Billy realize there's a girl looking at him with big, brown eyes from the door. They stare at one another for a moment before Billy turns around, back to Max. He can hear the girl shuffle across his floor, and then she's climbing up to sit beside Steve, between the oldest and Max.

"She's ninety fuckin' pounds, she isn't gonna fit in my shit," Billy reasons, holding a hand up to her.

"We're gonna cut it up," she explains, then lifts up another shirt, deems it unworthy and tosses it back in before she's digging around.

"Like hell you are," Billy says, crossing the room and dropping the darts on top of the dresser. Just as he approaches, she holds up a half sleeve, turning it around and closing an eye, as if trying to see what it would look like on Jane. "Hey!" He hisses, reaching for it, but she continues to hold it out of his grasp.

"You wore this, like, once!" Max reasons, holding the shirt behind he back. Out of the corner of his eye, he watches — El? Jane? — whisper something in Steve's ear, to which Steve nods.

"I still paid for it."

"You don't even wear half-sleeves!" She holds it up, rubbing the collar in his face, "And look! No buttons for you to wear down to your abs!" She pulls it away again, obviously scared that he might snatch it from her hands once more. "And besides, you already have another Metallica shirt, and Jane wants to fit in."

Billy glances over at her, and she gives him a sheepish smile.

“We can always get new ones there, you know.” Steve points out, scratching his jaw, and he knows to give up.

“Fine.” Max grins, then holds it up.

“We can cut it —“

“No way in hell. You’ll wreck it.” This time Billy really does reach over, grab it, take a look at the size of it, then looks to Max. “Go get your mom’s fabric scissors.”

Jane looks to her with wide, expectant eyes, and Max does as she’s told. Steve makes a comment about *fabric* scissors, and Billy tells him to shut up. Jane thinks it’s funny enough to deserve a giggle. Max brings the fabric scissors back, hands them over with an order not to ‘make it look trashy.’

“C’mere,” Billy says, waving Jane over, and she looks between Steve and Max, who both give her nods. Billy is pretty sure he doesn’t even *want* to know what’s going on. She climbs off the bed and stands in front of him.

Billy grunts as he lowers himself to kneeling, then helps her into the shirt. “Hold on,” he grunts, then leans over to his desk and rummages

around until he pulls out a piece of chalk.

“Why do you even have that?” Max asks, leaning over her friends shoulder as Billy marks off the few inches he needs to trim off the bottom.

“Why do you ask so many fuckin’ questions?” Billy asks, marking off the sleeves and the sides before he was telling them to get lost while he got to work.

Steve makes small talk, asks Billy for help with his chemistry questions while Billy snips bits of fabric away — Steve makes a joke, but after Billy threatens to take the scissors to his hair, Steve shuts up with those. Fifteen minutes later and the sleeves have nearly all been cut off, and the sides have been split. Rather than one seam, he’s cut strips into the sides, then bisected them right down the middle, so rather than each side being sewn together, it’s simply two dozen two-inch deep, thin fabric strips. He has Jane try it on for size, and when she’s happy with it, he and Steve get to work tying each little strip to it’s opposite.

Max is grinning wide to herself when they finish, and Jane skips right over to the mirror, runs her hands over the fabric, over the image of an electric chair with the slogan ‘RIDE THE LIGHTNING’ beneath it. She turns around, a wide smile on her lips.

“Bitchin’.”

Its Saturday, and Steve has purchased Jane a pretzel for her and Max to share. They're standing, waiting for the show. Billy's teeth are aching for a cig, but after the glare Jane had fixed him with after the last one he lit up, and Max grabbing it, stomping it out and wasting a perfectly good cigarette for the second time that week, Billy's gonna stop trying his luck.

He can manage, anyway, on pure excitement alone. Steve has purchased a tour shirt in two sizes too big only so Billy can steal it in a couple days — Steve buying things for Billy? Unacceptable. Billy stealing clothes from Steve? Fine in his book. By his eyes, he was a modern day Robin Hood; stealing from the rich (Steve) and giving to the poor (himself).

"You aren't… scared, right?" Max asks, tearing off another piece of the bread and stuffing it in her mouth. *Eat like a lady* , her mother said — but eating in tiny bites meant she got less food when Billy was stuffing his face.

Jane looks over at her, then shakes her head, takes another bite of pretzel. "They look like my sister's friends."

By now, Max had heard all about Kali and her adventures in Chicago, if you could call it that. "Sick," Max grinned.

"I like your hair."

Max beams, looking away. She'd kind of freaked out about it, until Billy dragged her into his room, teased some of it, sprayed some hairspray around, then kicked her out — she would've been mad if

her hair didn't end up looking cool. "Thanks. Yours, too."

"You did it." Jane replies. The drive up to Indianapolis was long, so Max had done it up in a bobble on the top of her head with a black glitter scrunchie. In return, Jane had helped Max smudge some black eyeshadow into her lash line. She holds the pretzel out to Max. "Last bite?"

"All yours." She grins when Jane does, then pushes the last bite into her mouth and wipes her hand on her jeans. "When we get back to Hawkins, you should teach me how to do makeup like you."

"You like it?"

"Yeah. It makes you look…. chic."

"Chic?"

"Yeah. Stylish, and stuff."

Jane perks. "Bitchin'!"

"Yeah, exactly like bitchin'." She agrees. The lights dim and the crowd moves, all pushing forwards to get as close to the stage as they could. Jane looks panicked for a second, so Max reaches out, grabs her hand. "Just don't let go!" She yells over the cheering. Billy and Steve are still behind them, but Steve has his hands full trying to get

Billy not to start throwing punches at people shoving his sister.

Its a few minutes the music starts, with only a guitar riff, and Max pulls Jane closer as more people push to get closer. Soon the first song starts playing, and the two Hargroves start yelling along lyrics while their respective dates look on in an amazed fondness.

It isn't until the second song, when someone from the mosh pit nearly runs into the two girls — narrowly saved by Billy's quick hands.

He bends a little, just to get on Jane's level. "You okay?"

She seems unbothered by the sweaty man that had nearly just crushed them from behind. "Can't see," she responds.

Billy grabs Steve's attention, pulls Max towards him and bends down, guiding one of her feet to his knees. He helps her swing her other leg over his shoulders, then stands up. Beside him, Steve has gone for the opposite method of making Max jump, then lifting her over his shoulders.

The girls are wearing twin smiles when they're lifted up, and Max raises her devils horns as she moves along to the music. Jane watches, a little confused, before Max notices and give a laugh. She pulls her hand over and curls her middle and ring finger in, then her thumb over those two. "Like this!" then lifts, waves her hands above her head. Jane laughs, honest and open, before she's doing the same.

The concert goes on for — well, they don't know how long, only that their legs go numb but they keep the girls lifted and out of harms way. It's worth it, Billy thinks, when he looks up and can see the smile on Max's face. It's nice to see her smiling like she did in San Diego.

They find someone with a polaroid, and Steve says he'd give him ten dollars for a few pictures — two of Max and Jane beside the big poster, two of Steve and Billy, and one of all four of them.

Armed with pictures, they take off down to Hawkins. This trip doesn't last long before it's interrupted.

"Billy, I'm hungry."

"You had a pretzel."

"Like, three hours ago." He checks the time, and yeah, she was right.

"Hey," Steve grabs his attention before he can respond, points up ahead to a greasy spoon in the middle of the desolate road. "I could use some coffee, or something." He says, and Billy reaches over, runs a hand through Steve's hair.

"Alright."

It's marginally busy for something so out of the way, but the rest of

the customers are truckers, meaning the two pairs stick out. No one *says* anything, but they're sure as hell looking.

The girls share an order of french fries and a milkshake, while the Steve orders pancakes ("Really? At this time?") and Billy burns his way through a basket of onion rings ("I hope you brought toothpaste if you want a goodnight kiss.")

It's midnight, in a diner in the middle of Indiana, and Billy's pretty damn happy with how things are.

Author's Note:

> unbeta-ed, all mistakes are mine. title from the outlaw torn by metallica. i'm not super happy with this but the world needs more harringrove + elmax.